

**AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF THE SOUTH**  
**2017-2018 Executive Minister's Report**  
**James M. Harrison, D.Min.**  
**25 April 2018**

The following lines represent the third Executive report of activities, accomplishments, and challenges remaining, inclusively, May 2017 through April 2018. This report may also be found at ([www.abcots.org](http://www.abcots.org)) by clicking resources, then official documents.

We have already introduced the theme, “Recalling, Reclaiming, and Renewing”, as a focus for our moving forward together. Keeping in mind the original goals of the region’s organizing team namely, (A.) the idea of expanding opportunities for racially integrated Christian witness and fellowship, (B.) the idea of supporting educational opportunities in the work of the historically black colleges and universities especially those having organizational roots in the mission work of the American Baptists, (C.) and the idea of supporting the work of partnering ecclesiastical entities and social justice agencies promoting peace and welfare for the uplifting of humanity.

The activity of recalling we still welcome volunteers and your suggestions of persons who might give us oral interviews sharing recollections about the birth of the region in the late sixties and early seventies. Earnest attempts are being made to establish stronger relationships with the historically black colleges and universities in our region. We have begun a financial support campaign to generate \$150,000.00 to be distributed in the amount of \$50,000.00 each to the three seminaries associated with Morehouse College (Morehouse School of Religion) in 2018; Shaw University (Shaw Divinity School) in 2019; and Virginia Union University (School of Theology) in 2020. It is our hope that the first gift can be delivered by September 2018. Please help us to identify persons who may have been present at the organizational meeting of ABCOTS held in Charlotte, North Carolina, or the first annual session of ABCOTS held in Richmond, Virginia. Thank you to the volunteers who continue to search our archives for artifacts of rich historical significance in order that we may properly store and care for them.

The activity of reclaiming as we have afore stated is about acknowledgement. There exist churches we have been in relationship with who have not supported our covenant agreement for a period of time. We continue to reach out to them through announced and unannounced visits, phone, and email contacts. We are scheduled to introduce Orientation to ABCOTS Life as a training event in the 2018 Annual Session meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. OTAL is an opportunity to introduce new pastors, church Lay Leaders, and others seeking to raise awareness of ABCOTS culture, services and resources. Former and current ABCOTS workers may also be refreshed about policy, procedures, and responsibilities. This training event will continue to be offered during future annual sessions. The Rev. Wendell Johnson and the Reverend Dr. Keith Ivan Jones will co-lead this event. Additionally, Mrs. Cheryl Blowe McDowney Christian Education Specialist serving with the Baptist General Convention of Virginia will lead the Christian Education training event during the Atlanta meeting. We are fortunate to have her join us.

An ABCOTS brochure is being crafted to share while visiting churches in order to give a glance at the region, its work, mission, and services. Contact information will be offered, including electronic connections. This product comes out of a work session with the Board of Directors. It will be offered for review in the November 2018 Board of Directors meeting. Additionally, on-line-giving opportunities have been introduced via the web-site, ([www.abcots.org](http://www.abcots.org)) for contributions being made to American Baptist Mission Support, Specifics and Target giving. Giving histories among our churches are alarming!

At the close of 2017 with 234 member churches participating it seems 31% of our churches have not participated for two years in American Baptist Mission Support, not contributing to any cause through American Baptist. During 2017 36% of our member churches are giving below the minimum covenant agreement. For the same period of time, the twelve months of 2017, 44% of our member churches have not contributed to American Baptist Mission Support. The same 234 Churches witnessed only (46) churches giving \$3,000 +, only (24) churches giving \$5,000 +, and only (7) churches giving \$10,000+.

The activity of renewing in our context has to do with introducing and establishing new relationships with churches willing to affiliate with ABCOTS. This is speaking of renewal in our region. The attempt here is to build a broader base of member congregations. Each annual session should produce (3-5) new church

memberships with your help. The following new churches will be introduced at the 2018 annual session:

Cedar Grove Baptist Church, Farber, Virginia

The Rev. Bernard Wells, Pastor

St. Mary Baptist Church, Miami, Florida

The Rev. Zachary Royal, Pastor

New Freedom Baptist Church, Pittsboro, North Carolina

The Rev. Kerry Hawkins, Pastor

The new church member packet has been stream-lined and simplified for ease of reading and understanding. The Institutional chaplains' names and contact information have been added to the directory of churches. Many of our chaplains may not serve in the vicinity of an American Baptist Church leaving them out-of-the-loop so to speak on receiving information. Please do not overlook the Chaplains when sharing information about ABCOTS. We will continue to make every effort to include our schools' personnel and students in programming for the annual sessions. We remain grateful for the support of national affiliate partners in our annual sessions, sharing expertise, and making opportunities for participation in mission projects.

We welcome Staff, Faculty and students of Morehouse College and Morehouse School of Religion to the 48<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of ABCOTS. This is a beginning of renewing relationships with our colleges and seminaries housed in region of the south. Dr. Joseph Evans, Dean of the School of Religion will preach on Tuesday night during the opening ceremonies. Dr. Howard Bennett, who serves as chair of the Department of Religion and Philosophy, will lead the Bible Studies during the annual session.

We also welcome the Reverend Dr. Lee Spitzer to the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Session speaking for the Denominational Luncheon. This event is designed to highlight ABC/USA national leaders and introduce them to ABCOTS local churches. We introduced this opportunity in 2016. In addition to Dr. Spitzer, we have been blessed and fortunate to have with us in our region meeting in some speaking capacity, Dr. Jeffrey Haggray, Executive Director of the American Baptist Home

Mission Society, Rev. Sharon Koh, Executive Director of International Ministries, and Dr. Susan Gillies, Interim General Secretary, 2016-2017.

We have contributed to Morehouse School of Religion \$25,000.00, which represents half our goal of \$50,000.00. Please help us to deliver the second half of this goal of \$25,000.00 by December 2018. Please remember we want to concentrate on a gift of \$50,000.00 to Shaw Divinity School in 2019, and the same delivered to The Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in 2020.

Moving forward, we will witness the 2019 Biennial Summit by the Sea meeting June 21-23 at Virginia Beach, Virginia. We have been asked by the Office of the General Secretary to support this event first by organizing a Local Arrangements Committee. This committee will be led by Dr. Betty Long. We need each of you to assist as we host the Biennial meeting in Region of the South developing activities such as, a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Organization of Region of the South, Plenary Sessions and Speakers, Worship/Music, and a Sunrise Service on the beach. Please contact our office or Dr. Long at First Baptist Church, Hampton, Virginia.

Finally, Join April 29,30, May 1 and 2, 2019 in Baltimore, Maryland at the Radisson Hotel at the inner harbor.